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SERMONS OF JAMES FREEMAN CLARKE

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REJOICE EVERMORE

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Under this title there will be published once a month one of James Freeman Clarke's sermons. It is not proposed that the sermon published shall always be of most recent date; but the selection will be left to Dr. Clarke, and, so far as possible, special attention will be paid to the needs of the Post-office Missions.

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VII. "The Wrath of the Lamb."
VIII. Rejoice Evermore.
IX. Dorothea L. Dix.

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REJOICE EVERMORE.

"Rejoice evermore."—1 THESS. v., 16.

THIS seems a simple and intelligible requisition, and yet it involves some difficulties. Why should we rejoice all the time? Are there not sad hours as well as glad ones in life? Is it suitable to rejoice at our own misfortunes or sins? Is it right to rejoice at the misfortunes or sins of others? Can we rejoice in hours of national disaster, or when the news comes of terrible accidents to our fellow-creatures? Shall we rejoice when evil triumphs and right is defeated? Shall we be glad when cunning and knavery succeed and honesty fails? Shall we be thankful when the government of the country or city is in the hands of spoilsmen? when iniquity abounds, and the love of many waxes cold? If there is a time to rejoice, is there not also a time to mourn? Why, then, should we rejoice evermore?

If, when our hearts are saddened by calamity, we try to rejoice, will it not argue levity or unseasonable mirth? Is not seriousness an important part of life? Such are some of the difficulties which our text suggests.

And, if we could rejoice always, what good would this do? Why ought we to rejoice? Ought the disciples to have rejoiced when Jesus was being crucified? He said beforehand that then they would weep and lament, but the world would rejoice. His enemies might rejoice, but not his friends.

In short, what is the good of perpetual joy? On what ground

does the apostle say here, "Rejoice evermore," and elsewhere, "Rejoice in the Lord alway, and again I say, Rejoice." It is certain that the whole tone of the New Testament is the same. It teaches a religion of joy all through. Jesus begins his first sermon by declaring the poor in spirit, the meek, the pure in heart, the sufferers, the needy, the persecuted, to be blessed. He reaches down to those who mourn and who are oppressed, and declares them to be supremely happy. The very word "gospel" means "good news." His kingdom was to bring such joy to men that it was announced by angels as giving peace to earth and being a blessing to mankind. Joy is the pervading element in the teaching of Jesus. It is a religion of trust, hope, blessed anticipation, comfort, and peace.

We must, however, see that Jesus does not teach any pure optimism in the sense of ignoring evil. Evil was to him something so real and terrible that it were better to cut off the right hand, and pluck out the right eye, than yield to it. He teaches us to ask every day that we shall not be led into temptation, but delivered from evil. He sees sin as a dark background, making life not gloomy indeed, but very serious. In this life, evil is to be opposed constantly, untiringly, and with all our force. But to do this, we must work in faith, not doubt; in hope, not fear. To have courage to oppose evil, we must hope to conquer it. We are soldiers; and we must fight on the side of truth, justice, goodness, against falsehood and wrong. But soldiers who have lost their courage are demoralized, and are already defeated. Jesus saw all the evil; saw the power of temptation; saw that, when the spirit is willing, the flesh is weak; saw his approaching death, the disciples' desertion, the traitor's betrayal. But, below it all, he saw the foundation of rock, the great principle that God reigns, and that, therefore, truth and good must triumph. And this filled the depths of his soul with that central joy which causes the four Gospels to be full of sunshine. Many religious books are sad; many religious people are gloomy. But there

is no gloom in the New Testament. It is full of good news to mankind, and bright with trust and hope.

But when Paul says, "Rejoice alway," he does not mean a constant outward expression of joy. He does not mean that we should be always smiling, always gay, forever saying, "How glad I am!" Joy, like all other Christian graces, is in the depth of the soul, not on the surface. It is being, not appearance. It is in the spirit, not the letter. To "pray without ceasing" does not mean that we should be always saying our prayers, but to be always near God in spirit, feeling our dependence on him, and able to turn to him for comfort and strength whenever we need it. If we were always "saying our prayers," we should not be able to attend to our duties. So, to keep the Sabbath is not to abstain outwardly from all work, but chiefly to have rest in the soul. We may have work we ought to do on Sunday, but we ought always to have rest and peace within. There is no safe rule for keeping Sunday but this,—so to spend its hours as to be refreshed in soul and body for our coming duties. Christ does not give a system of outward rules for our behavior, but gives the spirit which shows itself in all conduct and character. To "rejoice alway," therefore, means to have the spirit of joy deep down in the soul, a current of life running below the surface. And this comes from faith in divine goodness, and hope that all things will end at last in good.

Here is a man who, with all outward means of happiness, is not happy. No matter what his success in life is, he is dissatisfied. We see it in his face, we hear it in the tones of his voice. He has no faith in human progress, no trust in the future of mankind. He sees the wrongs and evils and faults in all men and all things, except in himself. He is a self-appointed censor and critic, a sharp and hard judge of others. He is inwardly in a state of unrest. His deepest life is morbid, because he has no assured hope.

And here is another, outwardly unsuccessful, with many trials

and bitter sorrows. This may give a serious aspect to his face and a tone of gravity to his voice. Outwardly he may not seem to have much gladness or joy. Yet his look is serene, his voice composed; he does not complain. He brings strength and courage with him wherever he goes. He has joy deep down in his heart,— the joy of faith and hope; and this makes his presence a comfort and a pleasure.

If we trace this spirit of joy to its profound source in the soul, we shall find that it comes from a hope of better things in the future than we have in the present. It is the spirit of hope toward God; hope full of immortality, which rejoices in the coming glory of God; hope born of experience; hope which makes not ashamed. It is hope which inspires courage, which is the spring of progress, without which progress will never take place.

God gives to children a great stock of hope, and thus of gladness. Every day dawns to the child filled with expectation. He goes forth to his daily tasks or daily plays full of hope, and thus full of courage. He rejoices in hope.

See the joy of hope in the lives of inventors. They often have a hard time: they sow, and others reap. But to invent is itself a delight. Alvan Clark, who has recently died, the inventor of the best way of making telescopes, had a constant expression of satisfaction on his countenance. He had learned how to make the most perfect lenses; and he had completed the five largest and finest telescopes in the world,— that at Washington, the one at Chicago, the one ordered by the Emperor of Russia, the one ordered by the King of Portugal, and that for the Lick Observatory in California. I do not know that this success brought him any large fortune; but it brought him a happy life, up to eighty years of age.

The reformer rejoices in hope. He is ridiculed, bitterly opposed, often fails, but is never discouraged, never unhappy. It has been my fortune to know many reformers in my life,

ardent philanthropists,— like Sumner, Garrison, Dr. Howe, Governor Andrew; and all were happy men. Persecuted, they were not forsaken; cast down, they were not destroyed.

Take, as another illustration of this point, the characters of Carlyle and Emerson. These two friends differed widely intellectually, and still more in character. They had in common a snpreme love of truth, a hatred of shams and insincerities, a belief in the supremacy of justice and right. The activity and difference of their intellectual tendencies were a mutual stimulus and a constant gratification. Each had a profound esteem for the other's genuine qualities. But they were counterparts in their intelligence and supplements in character. Emerson had the keenest insight, glances which penetrated to the centre, but no method or continuity in his thought. Carlyle was a master of method, could exhaust a subject, and conquer it by logical approaches. Carlyle was a born critic, giving admirable portraits of men and things. Emerson was often wrong in his criticisms, thinking, for instance, that Shelley was no poet. Emerson was pure, calm thought, hardly disturbed by affection or prejudice,— cold and clear as Alpine snow. Carlyle was filled with heat and prejudice, with devoted reverence for his heroes, with scorn and contempt for those who were not to his taste. But deeper than these differences were the differences in the undercurrents of their lives. Both believed in the supreme grandeur of truth and justice; but Carlyle despaired of their triumph, while Emerson never doubted for a moment that they would conquer. Hence the radical discontent of Carlyle, his permanent dissatisfaction, his savage access of contempt for his fellow-men, the impossibility he found of living in peace with himself or others. And hence the serene calm of Emerson, his cheer, his sweetness, his benign human kindliness, his modest and manly confidence in God and man. The undertone of Carlyle was sadness; that of Emerson, joy. Emerson rejoiced evermore in hope. Carlyle was made miserable because without hope.

We shall notice a like contrast, if less marked, between the two great living poets of England, Tennyson and Browning. Tennyson has acquired a great reputation and a title ; his poetry has been admired by the world ; and yet he finds the world going wrong and the times out of joint. His faith has failed him in his later years. But Browning has never ceased to believe in the providence of God and the law of progress. His keen insight has shown us all sorts of human weaknesses and villanies ; but he still has trust in humanity and in a divine guidance of the world. Therefore, his poetry becomes more and more inspired with joy and with a confident expectation of good. He also rejoices in hope.

There is a striking passage in a letter from Rousseau to Voltaire which throws light upon this subject. Voltaire had written a book to show that this world is, on the whole, a bad one, full of misery and evil. Rousseau wrote an answer, in which he maintains that there is much more joy than sorrow in life ; and in this answer occurs the following passage : —

" *You*, Voltaire, live surrounded by wealth and abundance. You are surfeited with glory, sure of an immortality of fame. You philosophize in peace on the nature of the soul. Yet you find only evil here below. *I*, an obscure man, poor, tormented with an incurable disease, enjoy life in my retreat, and find only good in the world. Whence this strange contrast ? You yourself have explained the seeming contradiction. *You* enjoy ; I hope ! And *hope* makes all things beautiful."

There is no inconsistency between seriousness and joy. The most serious joys are the deepest. Such is the joy of noble struggle for good objects,— the conflict of right against wrong ; the devotion of the patriot ready to die for his country ; the self-sacrifice of the generous giver, whose aim is to help his neighbor. These are all serious, earnest ; and they confirm the words of the wisest man of our age, who says, " Earnestness alone gives value to life."

Nor is the best joy that which shuns the thought of evil. It comes from no superficial optimism, which ignores or underrates the miseries of the world. It sees them, feels them, but has faith that they can be overcome.

What a cheerful tone pervades the Gospels! Yet what more serious than the teaching of Jesus! To him, sin was the great evil which he came to encounter, from which he was to save mankind. He came to seek and to save the lost. But his words are full of cheer; they abound in hope. I have sometimes gone into a church where I heard denunciations of error and sin, descriptions of the wrath of God against sinners, gloomy pictures of future judgment and retribution. Going home, I have opened the New Testament, and found myself in another climate,— one of hope, courage, glad inspiration. I found myself near to my God, whose sun shines on the evil and good,— near to a heavenly Father, who loves all his children, who sends his son into the world, not to condemn the world, but to save it. The seriousness of the Gospels is infused with a divine love.

Of all hope, that of the Christian goes down deepest and soars highest, and therefore gives the greatest joy. The gift of Jesus to mankind has been his faith in the never-failing presence of an Infinite Love. He, first of all human beings, rose to this perfect and unfailing confidence, and so has inspired the human race with this divine influence, which will continue to work till the whole race is full of the knowledge of God. This is our hope in dark hours, in bereavements, in disappointments, in the midst of temptation and evil. This is our hope when good seems conquered and wickedness triumphant. This is our hope when we ourselves fail of our duty, and fall into wrong. It is that God is still our Father, Helper, Friend, and that all things will end in good at last. This is the hope, full of immortality, when we stand by the cold form of our dear ones, and when we ourselves bid farewell to life. This hope is

the power of progress, the secret of improvement, the motive for earnest effort to make the world better and life happier. That is why we are told to rejoice in the hope of the glory of God.

The deep foundation on which hope rests is faith in goodness,— faith that God is goodness, and that therefore goodness is stronger than evil, and must at last conquer all evil. We see evil around us, and we find evil in ourselves; but, if we really have faith in God, we are sure that the Divine Goodness will conquer it. With this unshaken trust planted in the soul, we can believe that all things are working together for ultimate happiness. Therefore, we can wait,— wait peacefully and patiently for that final triumph. We find God above all things, through all things, and in all things; and so we are safe, contented, satisfied. We see life advancing around us, the world growing better, and all things alive with the spirit of progress. We see one evil after another put down. The old superstitions which filled life with terror have disappeared in the advance of science. The bitter spirit of persecution has been softened. The time has passed, and passed forever, when it was thought a duty to burn witches and heretics. In our own day, we have seen the end of slavery on this Northern Continent. So we have faith that other evils are also to disappear,— war, intemperance, pauperism, and bigotry in the Church. Jesus came to give this great hope to mankind, founded on his faith in God as Father and Friend. This is his gift to humanity, which enables us to pray that God's kingdom may come and his will be done on earth as it is in heaven. With this trust in the depth of the heart, what will not man patiently endure? He can bear infirmity, want, bereavement, loneliness, as long as he can say, with the apostle, that he is persuaded "that neither life, nor death, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any created thing, can separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

Unhappily, Christians have not always held to this high hope. They have often allowed themselves to doubt the perfect love of the Father, and to relapse into the Paganism of the earlier ages. They have thought it a merit to be sad, and have placed religion in self-torture and ascetic denial. They have believed in dark superstitions, in the power of Satan, in a God of wrath, an everlasting hell by the side of an everlasting heaven. Thus, the great hope of Christ has been darkened in human hearts. And this is why it is necessary to say, "Rejoice!" "Rejoice in hope." "Rejoice in the Lord alway, and again I say, Rejoice." Rejoice always! Not merely when you are well and strong and doing right, but when the clouds of evil and wrong close around you and darken your day. Rejoice always, for God is always near; and his support will never fail. Rejoice! for it is good and right to hope; and without hope we are without God in the world.

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